



CHCHD News

Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department

<http://health.hamiltontn.org>

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Preparing for Pandemic Flu:

Community invited to the unveiling of the Hamilton County Pandemic Flu Response Plan

As part of Hamilton County's ongoing initiative to prepare for a possible of a pandemic flu outbreak, the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department is hosting a community-wide meeting to unveil the Hamilton County Pandemic Influenza Response Plan on Friday, April 20th, 2007 from 9:30-11:00 a.m. at the Health Department located on 921 East Third Street in the Golley Auditorium.

Most Americans are familiar with influenza or the "flu", a respiratory illness that makes hundreds of thousands of people sick every year. For most healthy people, the flu is not usually life-threatening. Pandemic influenza is another matter. Pandemic flu occurs when a disease evolves so that it can pass easily from person to person, and there is little immunity. Unlike seasonal flu, pandemic flu can infect the young and healthy as well as the frail and sick. The current virus of concern is an avian influenza (bird flu) virus called H5N1. If bird flu evolves as a disease that can pass easily from person to person, it may become the next pandemic.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that in the United States, pandemic flu could cause up to 90 million hospitalizations and over two million deaths. Up to 35% of the workforce could be affected, and the economic impact in the United States could be up to \$166.5 billion.

"When a pandemic strikes in the U.S., local response is critical to slow the spread of the disease. It is imperative that we provide information to our community members so they know the facts, know what to expect, and understand what actions are planned," said Dawn Ford, Emergency Response Coordinator for the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department. "The better we prepare now, the better our chances will be for protecting the health of Hamilton County residents during an emergency."

The potential impact of a pandemic extends well beyond health and medical services into many segments in the community. Basic services such as utilities and transportation could be disrupted and developing a pandemic flu vaccine could take several months. Community prevention strategies may serve as a first line of defense to help delay or reduce the spread of disease.

"We have organized our planning for pandemic flu around a simple, but powerful, principle: in any large scale disaster, we need to work together to be effective. No one organization will be able to do it alone," said Ms. Ford. "We have partnered with community leaders and various agencies, hospitals, faith-based groups, businesses, schools, and emergency responders to create this comprehensive plan. Our next step is to meet with the residents of Hamilton County to share our plan and provide them with the knowledge and tools to prepare for a possible pandemic flu threat."

Hamilton County residents are invited to attend the community presentation of Hamilton County's local pandemic flu response plan. The presentation will highlight the objectives and strategies of the plan, and provide key facts and information for preparing the public against a pandemic flu threat.

The plan, which was completed in March of 2007, was developed after a year of planning with community leaders, partners, and agencies. The planning process for pandemic flu has better prepared Hamilton County to manage any number of public health threats, such as seasonal flu, bioterrorism or natural disasters. These planning advances include: improved rapid communication systems, expansion of disease surveillance systems, expansion of human resources and response teams, and expansion of supplies.

For more information about the pandemic flu community meeting, please call the Health Department at (423) 209-8074.

The full text of the Hamilton County Pandemic Influenza Response Plan can be found at <http://health.hamiltontn.org/>.

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